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Desk BOX

Peter Robinson makes a stunning desk box with striking joint detail and unique wooden hinges

When making small items such as boxes, I always try and elaborate on those sometimes overlooked areas that can be made into real eye-catching features.

The wooden hinges, for example, make the design really interesting and unique, yet they're actually quite straightforward to make.

Here I'll guide you through the various steps to make this box and describe in detail how the hinges are made, in order for you to adapt the concept to your own project.

Timber choice

A box in its simplest form could be a rather uninspiring object, so my first job was to select a wood that had an interesting grain pattern that could be used to good effect. For this, I decided that yew was a good choice, with the heartwood ranging from light orange to red/brown and the sapwood a creamy white.

The lid and base are made from sycamore and the shallow tray is spalted beech.

I started by first carefully selecting the pieces for the front, back and sides, incorporating any interesting characteristics in the wood.

To keep a uniform appearance and also to save on wood, I planed two pieces, then cut them down the middle on my bandsaw, **photo 1**, which gave me all the pieces for the box sides. These I then planed to thickness and cut to length.

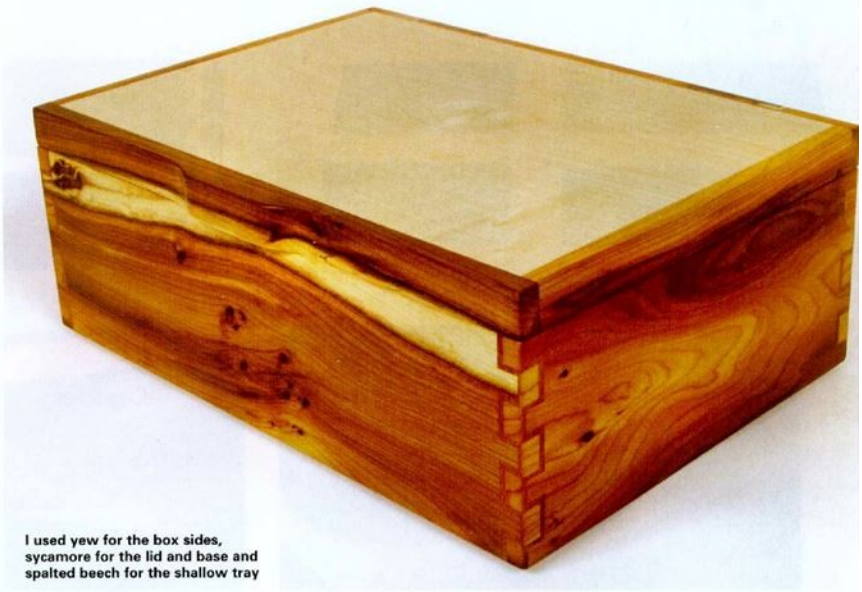
Corner joints

The joint used for the corners is a double box joint which is simply a decorative version of a traditional box joint created using my Incra jig, **photo 2**.

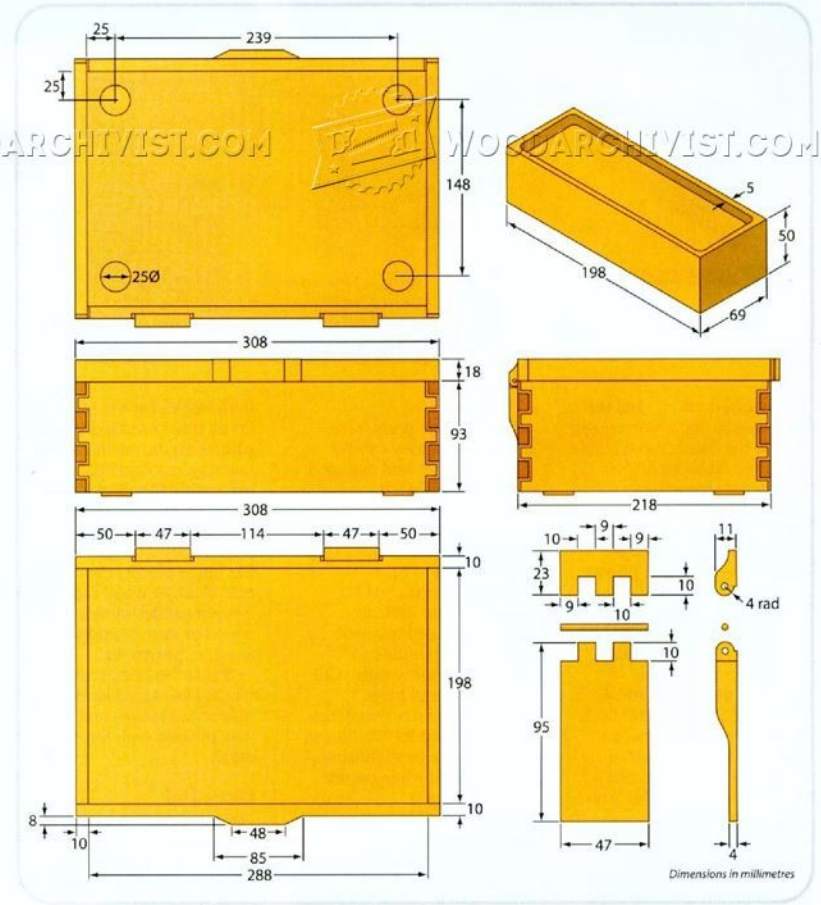
The basic method to forming this joint is to make a series of corresponding cuts in two pieces of wood and glue them together. Once dry, the excess material is trimmed off and the box joints are re-cut. The pieces are then joined together just like a traditional box joint, **photo 3**.

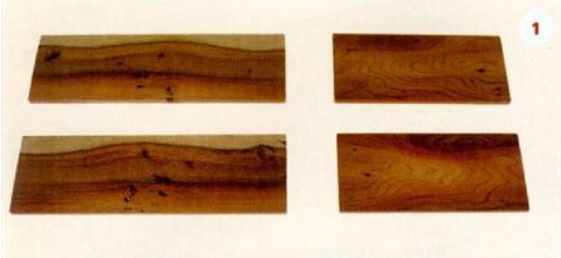
Base, feet & sides

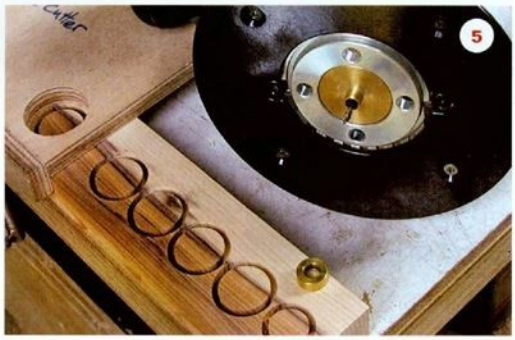
You'll notice that the base of the box is quite thick. There are two main reasons for this: one is because the feet

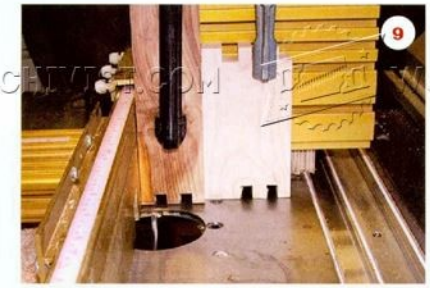


I used yew for the box sides, sycamore for the lid and base and spalted beech for the shallow tray









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are recessed into it, and the second is to add some weight so that the box is more stable when the lid is open.

After making an appropriate jig, I used my router equipped with a guide bush inlay kit to make the recesses in the base, **photo 4**. By using the same jig and following the instructions that came with the inlay kit I made the feet 3mm thicker than the depth of the recesses, **photos 5** and **6**.

Turning my attention back to the sides of the box, a rebate can now be cut to accept the base; recesses for the hinges are also cut. The main reason behind recessing the hinges is to make sure that they're parallel to one another and perpendicular with the back of the box.

Once all the parts have been sanded they can be glued together and clamped overnight, **photo 7**.

Wooden hinges

Making wooden hinges may seem at first to be a complicated task but it's really not that difficult. Although I used my Incra jig, it would be possible to achieve similar results with just a few hand tools.

First, thickness the pieces that'll be used for the hinges then, using a bead/nosing cutter, cut a profile on one end, **photo 8**.

Using a straight cutter, cut the grooves that'll form the interlocking part of the hinge in both halves, **photo 9**, and finally a hole can be drilled in both halves for the hinge pin. To do this I used a drill guide, **photo 10**, but with careful marking out and drilling accurately this could have easily been done without.

To shape the hinges, I simply drew the outline onto the hinge pieces, clamped it to a block of wood then, with a drum sander mounted in my pillar drill, I sanded it to the line, **photo 11**.

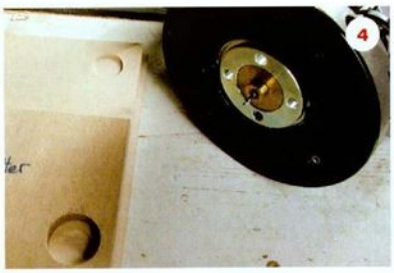
This is the first project where I've incorporated a pair of wooden hinges and I was very pleased with the end result.

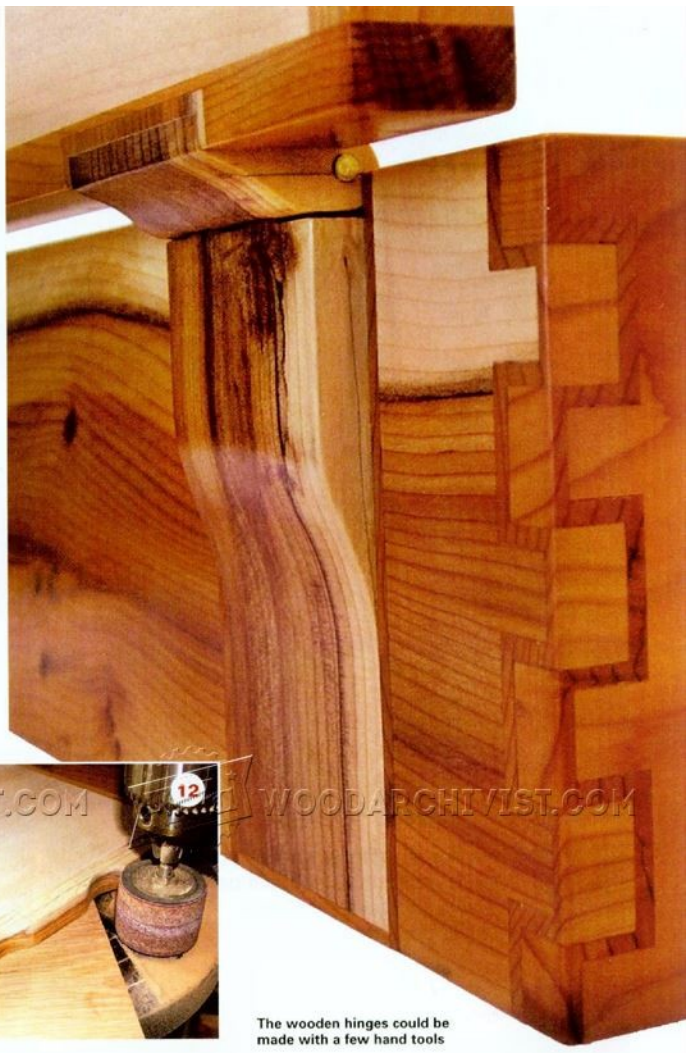
Box lid

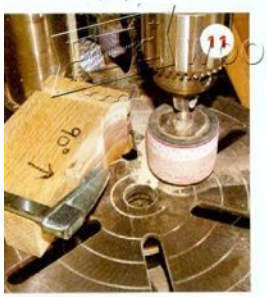
The construction of the lid is fairly straightforward but I advise that you follow the sequence of steps in order to achieve a good fit.

First, I thicknessed the centre section and cut to size, this being the same as the internal dimensions of the box as I intended the pieces that surround it to be the same thickness as the sides. You may also have noticed that it's quite thick – this is so that there's more surface contact when gluing the top part of the hinge.

Once you've cut the centre section, the pieces that surround it can be cut. The one at the back is cut to the correct size, the two side pieces are cut to the correct length but 3mm wider than they should be, and the front piece is left slightly longer and twice the finished width (19mm). All the pieces are then glued in place.







The wooden hinges could be made with a few hand tools

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Hinge recesses

Recesses now need to be cut into the back of the lid in order to accommodate the top of the hinges. I did this by positioning the lid onto the box and marking it in the appropriate place, then removing the excess material on the table saw.

With the hinges already glued to the back of the box, the lid can be glued to the hinges while in the closed position. Be careful not to overdo it with the glue as you won't want to glue the lid shut!

Once dry, turn the box upside down and draw around it, marking the underside of the lid, and then remove it. This will show how much material will need to be removed.

After marking out the shape of the handle, I removed the material with my drum sander in the same way as for the hinges, **photo 12**. The lid was then re-attached to the box and the excess material removed with a router and a bearing-guided flush trimming bit.

Shallow tray

I intended the box to be used as a desk box. Thinking about some of the things that might be put into it, I decided to add a shallow tray to avoid smaller items being lost at the bottom. This is, in essence, a block of spalted beech with a shallow recess cut into it with a ⅞in radius round-nose bit. The tray can then be glued in place.

Finishing

The final job was to remove the lid, sand thoroughly, and then apply several coats of Danish oil.

I was very pleased with the finished piece and those of you who visited the Stoneleigh 2005 exhibition may recall seeing it on display.

EXHIBITION DATE

Peter Robinson's box won him second prize in the Routing competition at last year's International Woodworking exhibition. This year's show takes place at the Staffordshire County Showground on the 13-15 October. For more details go to www.getwoodworking.com/iwe